



THE
ATHENÆUM
PALL MALL LONDON

WINE COMMITTEE
LUNCH
FOOD & WINE
OF ITALY – VENETO

Wednesday 19th October 2022

SPEAKERS:
DR VICTORIA PRESTON AND
PROFESSOR STEPHEN BAYLEY

CHAIRMAN:
PROFESSOR JAMES CRABBE



Canaletto (Giovanni Antonio Canal) (Italian, Venice 1697–1768 Venice)



MENU

Spritz Veneziano (Aperol ABV 11% plus the Prosecco !)



Soave Classico Calvarino, Pieropan,
DOC, 2019, 12.5% ABV

Baccala mantecata



Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico Giuseppe Lonardi
DOCG, 2016, 15.5% ABV

Uccellatti con polenta, Radicchio



Tiramisu



Bepi Tosolini Grappa Cividina Tipica, 40% ABV

Caffe

APERITIVO Spritz Veneziano (Aperol ABV 11% plus the Prosecco !).

A cocktail consisting of Aperol, a wine infused with bitter oranges, gentian, rhubarb, and cinchona, spritzed with Prosecco and soda water. Aperol was created only in 1919, but its origins are much earlier. Habsburg soldiers, merchants and diplomats found the local wine infusion of gentian flowers, rhubarb and cinchona bitter bark to be unpalatable. unless *gespritzt* in the Germanic way. It has become a classic Venetian *aperitivo* and a personal favourite of mine, much enjoyed sitting in an idyllic piazza, quenching my thirst after the rigors of several Venice Art Biennales. (VP)

In Venice, cocktail hour drinks are known as "*un ombra*" because of the shadow cast by the *campanile* in Piazza San Marco over tables in Florian's or Caffè Quadri in the late afternoon. But in Venice, it's almost always time for a drink.

It's hard to overstate the significance of Venice to our own culture.

How many of Shakespeare's plays are based in Italy? Exactly one third. And four of them in the Veneto. The greatest work of architectural criticism was Ruskin's 1851 *The Stones of Venice*.

Here we read: "Since the first dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones have been set upon its sands: Tyre, Venice and England".

What seven Venetian dialect words are current in English?

Lagoon. Gondola. Sequin. Arsenal. Quarantine. Lido. Ghetto.

This last dates to 10th April 1516 when Zaccaria Dolfin, one of the Savi of the Collegio - the governing body comprising the Doge, six councilors, three chiefs of the Council of Ten plus, for good measure, the Grand Chancellor - moved the Jews to the old northern parish of San Girolamo once famous as a cannon foundry. "*Ghetto*" means foundry in Venetian, although other etymologists have claimed a relationship with the Tuscan *guitto* which means sordid. The word is also suggestive of *borghetto* for "little town".

Henry James said Venice is the easiest city in the world to know.....without actually going there. "When I went to Venice" Proust said "my dream became my address".

He called it "the Mecca of the religion of beauty". However, Edward Gibbon was less positive. He thought the Grand Canal was a "nasty green thing" and said "The spectacle of Venice afforded some hours of astonishment and some days of disgust".

He went on to describe Venice as: "Old and in generally ill-built houses, ruined pictures, and stinking ditches, dignified by the pompous denomination of canals....and a large square decorated with the worst architecture I ever saw". After Gibbon, Truman Capote said it was like eating a whole box of liqueur chocolates in one go.

Venice combines opulence and decadence. Strong sensations. The notorious polyamorist Casanova was, after all, one of the most famous residents.

There's eros in the air. The wonderfully named "Ponte delle Tette" is near the Traghetto del Buso. Venetian authorities used to encourage prostitution both as a control for

homosexuality and a source of revenue: the bridge is so-called because the prostitutes were encouraged to show their breasts to deter Venetian youth from Sodomy. In 1509 someone estimated there were 11,565 prostitutes in the city. There is a morbidity too. Wladyslaw Moes, the ganymede in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, used to holiday with his family in the Grand Hotel des Bains on the Lido. This was a mere "site of delights" according to the snooty Henry James. James also raged against the "accursed whistling of the dirty steam engine of the omnibus to the Lido". That steam engine is, of course, the much-loved vaporetto. James (and Ruskin) thought Venice's picturesque misery must forever remain a part of the spectacle. Beggar girls looked better when under-fed. Javier Marias said Thomas Mann's chronic constipation may have had an affect on his brooding.

Venice is a test. It's the most beautiful city on earth. But it is also dead.

But there's more to the Veneto than Venice. There are Padua, Treviso, Verona and Vicenza. Verona has a dish of *pastissada de caval* which is horsemeat stewed with aromatic herbs and red wine. Treviso is famous for its *radicchio rosso* and a local omelette with "spontaneous" herbs including *carletti*, *sclopit*, *scrissioli*, *lampusetti* and *bubbolini*.

Antonio Palladio's Villa Capra, or 'La Rotonda', near Vicenza, Italy



Vicenza is famous for Palladio, perhaps the most influential architect ever, who lived and worked here from 1524-1580. He was happily born with the name della Gondola, but chose the *nom d'artiste* after an angel who appears in Trissino's epic *Jerusalem Liberated from the Goths*. Palladio's style of porticoed villas with subtle proportions and a whole vocabulary of form created an entire language of design that was specially influential in England.

Chiswick House on the A4 is a copy of the Villa Rotonda in Vicenza. But while "Palladio" is to the English an eponym for 'country house', the Vicentine villas were actually working farms where the proprietor could view the threshing floor from his beautifully proportioned salone. Or, in one unfortunate instance, die of convulsions after being bitten by a hen.

Marcella Hazan was to Italian food in the US what Elizabeth David was to Mediterranean food in our country. I once went on her cookery course in a tiny flat in Canagreggio. Here I learnt in six days not just how to be a better cook, a development much needed, but I also learnt a whole new approach to life itself.

Marcella's husband Victor Hazan co-directed the course. So far as I am concerned his 1982 book *Italian Wine* is unsurpassed. It may be technically dated, but its poetry is timeless. Victor insisted that the light coming off Lake Garda gave brightness to the wine. There were no recipes. "I don't measure, I cook" Marcella insisted. We had daily visits to the Rialto market to buy *caposanti* or whatever it was that looked good on the day. Serving *fegato alla veneziana*, an unctuous dish of calves' liver stewed with onions and resembling a steaming cow pat, Marcella explained "Italian food she don't have to look good".

I was going to put this on the menu today, but was severely warned off.

Instead, we have. **WINE & FOOD**

Baccala mantecata

This is salt cod whipped with oil, lemon and garlic, served on toast. It's the most popular of Venetian *cicchetti*, the snacks offered in the city's *bacari*, its wine bars. The legend is that the North Atlantic stockfish found its way to Venice after a merchant ship captained by Pietro Querini was shipwrecked on the Lofoten Islands in 1432. He eventually returned with sixty stockfish.

WHITE WINE Soave Classico Calvarino, Pieropan, DOC, 2019, ABV 12.5%

This is a premier league Soave, made from organically grown grapes that remain on lees in glass-lined cement tanks for a year, adding complexity and depth to the wine. Enjoy its aromas and flavours of green apple, almond, blossom and (some say) oyster shell. Calvarino, meaning 'Little Calvary', is so named owing to the steepness of the slopes and the challenges in working its volcanic basalt soil. Calvarino is the perfect wine for many kinds of fish dishes. This favourite from "Desert Island Wines" has been selected for the Coffee Room Wine List, so there will be many opportunities to enjoy it again in the future. (VP)

Uccellatti con polenta

This is little birds, shot in the lagoon and cooked over flame on skewers with squares of *polenta*, *pancetta* and sage.

Radicchio

The best of this red chicory comes from Treviso. Casanova travelled here to pawn a diamond ring so that he could afford the two hundred sequins he hankered for. There were no pawn shops in Venice, Casanova explained because the Jews (the merchants of Venice) "always manage to keep the monopoly to themselves". Radicchio is best served very simply roast with oil and salt. Sometimes served with a paste of borlotti beans.

RED WINE Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico Giuseppe Lonardi DOCG, 2016, 15,5% ABV

A traditional blend of 75% Corvina Veronese, 20% Corvinone, 5% Rondinella and Croatina, aged in oak vats for 36 months. Only the best grapes, grown organically, are selected, and are dried on wooden racks for 90 days in the process known as *appassimento*. During this time, the fruit loses at least 30% of its mass through dehydration. The resulting juice is rich, concentrated, and high in sugar content. The grapes are fermented for 30 days in stainless steel tanks with daily pumping over the skins and clearing the must. This results in a rich, spicy, warm, silky-textured and high ABV wine with aromas and flavours of ripe fruit and wild berries. Lonardi pairs beautifully with red meats, game, and poultry such as the delicious quail we are enjoying today. This wonderful wine has been selected to replace the Masi Amarone, currently on the Coffee Room Wine List, when stocks run out. (VP)

Tiramisu

The name comes from the Treviso dialect: "*Tireme su*". literally pick-me-up. It's said to have been served in C19th brothels to restore tired gentlemen on their return to more formal domestic conjugal duties. Some claim an origin in C17th Siena as delicacy prepared for Grand Duke Cosimo III. What's certain is that it was popularised by Ado Cameeol, proprietor of Treviso's long established Beccherie restaurant where it first appeared on the menu in 1972. In 1980, this mixture of *savoiard*i biscuits soaked in coffee, egg yolks whipped with sugar and *mascarpone* first appeared in an Italian dictionary.

Finally, to knock you down after you have been picked-up, perhaps a little taste of *grappa* (or *sgnapa* in Venetian, from the Germans *schnapps*.)

Grappa is a *pomace* brandy which is to say it's fermented from the detritus of wine-making: skins, pulp, stems and seeds. It's the Veneto equivalent of the French *marc*, the Chilean *aguardiente*, Spanish *orujo* and Georgian *chacha*. It "tastes like an axe" according to Dylan Thomas.

Ciao !

Venetian proverb

“Magna e bevi che a vita xe un lampo”.

‘Eat and drink because life goes by in a flash’.

WINE MAP OF ITALY



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